



The Commission on
Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity

CWCSEO

Connecticut General Assembly

CWCSEO Testimony in support of SB 948
"An Act Addressing Education Funding & Racial Equity in Connecticut"
Wednesday, March 3rd, 2021 ~ 10:00 AM via Zoom

Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez and all the members of the Education Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly (CGA), my name is Thomas Nuccio, Children and Families Policy Fellow of the CGA's Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity, and Opportunity (CWCSEO) I am pleased to submit testimony in support of SB 948 *"An Act Addressing Education Funding and Racial Equity in Connecticut."*

Raised Bill 948, if adopted, would improve the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) formula's phase-in schedule and fully funds all districts more equitably beginning in fiscal year 2022. This bill aims to revise the ECS formula used to calculate a town's equalization aid grant by amending the following factors:

- To increase and expand the ECS formula's existing weights for English Learners and students in districts with concentrated poverty.
- Provides ECS weighted funding for all public school students while protecting funding for local public schools;
- mitigates the volatility in student enrollments caused by COVID-19 by using pre-pandemic data;
- and most importantly keep intact the formula's overall structure.

The ECS formula is currently being phased in over 10 years. The phase-in began in FY 2019 and is currently in its third year. The phase-in was originally set to be completed in FY 2028 but if SB948 is adopted the phase in would be completed by FY 2022. It is important to remember the ECS formula is calculated on an annual basis using updated district and town data. Proponents of the bill have stated that a 5th grader would not receive the funding given until after they graduate at the rate we are going at now.

With the passage of SB 948, Connecticut can take a serious look at an making a more equitable distribution of funds to K-12 public education – understanding that the current system is inequitable. Racial disparities and wide gaps found in Connecticut education funding are historical barriers for communities of color in Connecticut. This bill reduces the racial funding gap by 74% and focuses funding on the most impacted districts. In Connecticut, public charter schools are educating 80% African American and Latino students. The School and State Finance Project released a report examining racial disparities in Connecticut public education. This report indicates funding gaps of \$639 million between districts with BIPOC student populations of at least 25% and districts with white student populations greater than 75%.

Another existing issue with the current state of the ECS formula is that public-school districts receive funding through the ECS formula that fails to consider student learning needs. This leaves behind more than 78,000 Connecticut public school students who attend other types of schools. Schools are funded with flat-dollar grants and yet again the students excluded from the ECS formula are disproportionately students of color. Connecticut's charter schools are comprised of 93 percent Black or Latino students and magnet schools are composed of 74% Black and Latino students.



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SB948 concerns provisions regarding the English Language learners. As we know the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the disparities experienced by communities of color. One of the most impacted groups are students who speak and read little English. In Connecticut, 26 percent of Hispanic students and 56 percent of white students were at or above proficient in grade 4 math. That's a 31 point disparity. The amount of students with limited English showing up to attend Connecticut's public schools is increasing year by year. Just a decade ago one student in every 20 was English learner and today the ratio is 1 out of 12 students. SB 948 would importantly increase the English Language Learner weight from 15% to 25%.

Summary of SB 948 ECS formula changes:

- **Fully funding ECS (expediting the current phase-in schedule).** However, we recognize that an immediate phase-out for districts that are currently overfunded may cause undue harm — particularly for the state's smallest districts.
- **Increasing the ECS student need-based weights:** Increase the **English Learner weight** from 15% to 25%; increase the **Concentrated Poverty rate** from 5% to 15%; and reduce the **Concentrated Poverty threshold** from 75% to 60% for districts to qualify for additional funding.
- The pandemic has caused significant **enrollment volatility** for almost every school district. The state's highest need, lowest wealth districts have been particularly affected by this. For this reason, **S.B. 948 uses the greater of the 2019 or 2020 student enrollment in calculating the ECS grant.**
- An inclusive ECS formula that would eliminate CT's over 10 disjointed funding formulas and bring weighted, **need-based funding to all public-school students** (including Magnet, Charter, and VoAg students).
- Reducing the **racial funding gap** by \$437 million. (i.e., racial funding gap of \$639 million between majority White districts and all other districts), SB948 would reduce that gap by about 68%.

SB 948 aligns directly with CWCSEO'S 2021 legislative priorities regarding education equity. To many the racial divide and lack of quality education is known as the second pandemic communities are faced with. This bill is about doing what is right and equitable for those most impacted students.

To better illustrate this group the table below shows the English Language Assessment and math score gap between African American and white students and the second table identifies the disparities between white and Latino students. (CGA)



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TABLE 1:

	ELA			MATH		
	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018
Black or African American	55.7	55.3	56.5	47.7	48.4	49.3
White	73.3	73	73.5	67.3	68.4	69
Score gap	17.6	17.7	17	19.6	20	19.7

TABLE 2:

	ELA			MATH		
	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018
Black or African American	57.3	56.6	57.6	50.2	51.1	52.1
White	73.3	73	73.5	67.3	68.4	69
Score gap	16	16.4	15.9	17.1	17.3	16.9

As these tables demonstrate, the disparities are stark, and the solution, as posed in this proposal, is urgent, equitable funding. We appreciate the opportunity to testify in favor of this bill, which will positively and primarily impact Black and Latino students, and students with families living in poverty. Please know that you can continue to rely on the Commission as a resource on this important issue.